Student hours: Online on Tuesdays, 12:00 pm to 12:30 pm, or by appointment

About the Instructor

I am Instructional Assistant Professor of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University (Instructional Associate Professor as of August 2022). My research is primarily on the death penalty, human rights, and comparative law. I have an M.Sc. in African Politics (London), a J.D. (Boston), and a Ph.D. in law (Middlesex). I am licensed to practice law in New York and Washington, DC.

Email: anovak2@gmu.edu

Readings

This course has one required textbook: Angela Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete? Seven Stories Press, 2003. However, this book is available on the internet for free and I have shared the link. All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.

These are the other readings (scanned readings are searchable and compliant with an optical reader):

Grading Scale

I will not use the grades “D+” or “D-.”


In addition, in the event that I must calculate grade fractions, I will always round up to the next highest point if you have a 0.45 or higher.

Grading Rubric

Your grade in this class is based on a cumulative point total.

12 Weekly Quizzes (15 points each): 180 points
12 Writing/Editing/Research Assignments (3 points each): 36 points
24 Weekly Workshops (1 point each): 24 points
Total: 240 points (20 points available each week for 12 weeks)

Late Policy

You must take 12 weekly quizzes, 12 assignments, and 24 workshops this semester. These are not timed and do not need to be completed in one sitting. If you are unable to complete a quiz by the deadline, you must notify me within 48 hours. Requests after 48 hours are at my discretion, so please do ask anyway. The sooner you ask, the more time you'll have to do the assignment.

At the end of the semester, I will provide a final deadline by which all late work must be turned in, including the weekly workshops. Typically, this will be right when I am about to calculate and upload grades. I cannot change a grade once it has been turned in, so it is essential all late work be turned in by the drop-dead deadline.

Since this class has no final paper or project other than the weekly assignments, it is not possible for me to give incompletes for late work.

Course Schedule

Lectures, readings, online assignments, quizzes, and workshops each week are available on Blackboard.

Week 1: Sunday, January 30, 2022: Introduction to Critical Criminology (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
  • Reading: Cottom, "Dying to Be Competent"

Week 2: Sunday, February 6, 2022: Myth of Colorblindness (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
  • Reading: Davis, Ch. 1

Week 3: Sunday, February 13, 2022: Overcriminalization (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Davis, Ch. 2

Week 4: Sunday, February 20, 2022: Policing (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Gau and Jordan, "Profiling Trayvon"

Week 5: Sunday, February 27, 2022: Prosecution (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Davis, Ch. 3

Week 6: Sunday, March 6, 2022: In the Courtroom (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Davis, Ch. 4

Sunday, March 13, 2022: SPRING BREAK 😎 (No work due)

Week 7: Sunday, March 20, 2022: Sentencing (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Davis, Ch. 5

Week 8: Sunday: March 27, 2022: Mass Incarceration (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Davis, Ch. 6

Week 9: Sunday, April 3, 2022: Collateral Consequences (Assignments due at 11:59 pm )
• Reading: Schenwar and Law, "Your Home Is Your Prison"

Week 10: Sunday, April 10, 2022: Death Penalty and Wrongful Convictions (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Mansnerus, "For What They Might Do"

Week 11: Sunday, April 17, 2022: Immigration Enforcement and Detention (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Garcia Hernandez, "The Money"

Week 12: Sunday, April 24, 2022: Going Global / Juvenile Justice (Assignments due at 11:59 pm)
• Reading: Tomlinson, "The New War on Sex"

Honor Code

Sharing of instructor-created materials, particularly materials relevant to assignments or exams, to public online “study” sites is considered a violation of Mason’s Honor Code. For more information, see the Office of Academic Integrity’s summary of information about online study sites. https://oai.gmu.edu/faculty-resource-center/preventative-resources/

The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification.
For the full Honor Code, see academicintegrity.gmu.edu.

Disability Accommodation

If you have a documented learning disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should (1) make sure this documentation is on file with Office for Disability Services (SUB I, Rm. 4205; 993-2474; http://ods.gmu.edu) to determine the accommodations you need; and (2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. I want to be helpful.

Diversity and Inclusion

As a faculty member and designated “Responsible Employee,” I am required to report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per university policy 1412. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact the Student Support and Advocacy Center (703-380-1434, http://ssac.gmu.edu) or Counseling and Psychological Services (703-993-2380, https://caps.gmu.edu). You may also seek assistance from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator (703-993-8730; titleix@gmu.edu, https://diversity.gmu.edu/sexual-misconduct).

This course seeks to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. We welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.